

Healthcare AI, Patient engagement

A guide for CEOs: What is patient engagement to a Patient Access Center Manager?

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In the first of our series taking CEOs on a guided tour of patient engagement challenges throughout the organization, we step into the world of the Patient Access Center. Get to know the pressures faced by Patient Access Center Managers and their staff and learn how the right patient engagement solutions can help them give every patient simple access to care and service.

A successful [patient engagement strategy](#) helps providers extend their standard of patient care beyond the brick and mortar to voice and digital interactions. It spans every aspect of operations across the healthcare journey, and takes a huge amount of effort from people in a multitude of roles to deliver the best experiences. To help you understand the challenges and needs of the people in those roles, this blog series will consider their unique patient engagement perspective, what they need to be successful, and how patient engagement solutions can help. First up, we'll zoom in on the Patient Access Center (or Contact Center) and walk a mile in its manager's shoes.

Balancing efficiency and experience

In early 2020, a surge in COVID-19 infections sent Patient Access Center call volumes through the roof. Already overworked agents were trying to keep up, and patients wait times were long. Today, the pandemic persists, the possibility of new variants looms—and now providers are facing staffing shortages.

When patients Google your organization, the first number that comes up is the Patient Access Center, so that's who they call. That means patients wanting to book appointments or needing help with their patient portal account are now in the same queue as thousands of people looking for COVID-19 advice and care.

Your Patient Access Manager has a choice: get more boots on the ground to handle demand (and ramp up costs) or get by with the current resources and hope you can ride out the storm (and risk turning staff burnout into staff walking out).

And remember, their performance is assessed on metrics like first call resolution (FCR) and average handle time (AHT). That means the agent who answers the call needs to have all the relevant information at hand—regardless of what the call is about.

Pressure on the Patient Access Center

The pandemic put Patient Access Centers under extreme pressure. But even outside of a public health crisis, the pressure to perform is immense.

Patients' expectations are set by their interactions with the world's customer service leaders—the biggest brands in retail, financial services, and telecommunications that invest millions to create customer experiences that give them a competitive advantage. When patients call the Patient Access Center, they expect that same level of slick, seamless service that gives them fast answers and rapid resolutions.

Meanwhile, there's pressure from leadership to shorten queue times, reduce AHT, and keep operational costs under control—all while delivering a superior patient experience that boosts acquisition and retention.

And let's not forget the pressure on the agents. Excessive workloads and lack of timely access to information don't just lead to high staff turnover; they also make it difficult for even the most dedicated agents to deliver the best service.

How patient engagement solutions help

All in all, it's a lot of competing pressures to consider, so Patient Access Center Managers need patient engagement solutions that can help them:

- Handle higher volumes and cope with spikes in demand
- Resolve patient inquiries quickly and effectively
- Give agents the tools and information to provide outstanding patient experiences

With an [AI-powered interactive voice response \(IVR\) system](#), for example, it becomes a lot easier to achieve these goals.

Rather than listening to strings of menu prompts, patients speak freely as if they were speaking with a human. An IVR built on the most advanced natural language understanding (NLU) technology can field calls and either resolve the issue itself through self-service automation (one less call for an agent to handle) or route the call to the most appropriate agent or department (providing the patient's details and the context of the conversation).

So, when patients call the Patient Access Center with billing inquiries or prescription refill requests, the IVR quickly gets them the help they need by routing their call appropriately. Patients can complete common tasks—like resetting passwords, rescheduling appointments, and answering FAQs—within an automated, conversational dialogue.

Intelligent IVR technology can provide the kind of seamless experience consumers have come to expect and give patients faster resolutions. Providers can collect data on reasons for calling and learn which self-service options would increase call containment and reduce agent workload and stress, as well as staffing costs.

By connecting patient engagement solutions like this to other organizational systems—including EHR, CRM, and billing systems—providers can access patient information and power a more personalized, automated experience or help agents resolve escalated queries more easily. Some patient engagement solutions will even provide agents with next best response recommendations or compliance reminders, helping even inexperienced agents deliver efficient, effective service.

Stay tuned for part two

For Patient Access Center Managers, AI-powered patient engagement solutions offer an escape from a world of fighting fires to a world where they can focus on enhancing the patient experience and ensuring every patient can access the care and support they need.

Next up in this series, we look at [patient engagement from a CMIO's perspective](#) and explore how the right solutions can help improve care quality and patient outcomes.

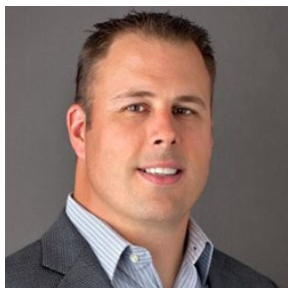
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More Information

Find the right solutions

Discover how to solve pressing patient engagement issues across the patient journey with Nuance Patient Engagement.

[Learn more](#)



About Justin Jacobson

Justin Jacobson is the Vice President and General Manager of Nuance's Patient Engagement Solutions business. Justin joined Nuance in 2021 following 10 years at one of the largest healthcare organizations in the world. Prior to Nuance, Justin held multiple healthcare roles spanning business operations, innovation, product management, integration management, customer loyalty and marketing. Justin has a B.A. from Wheaton College (IL) as well as an M.B.A. from the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management.



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